

שבת זכור

First Samuel, chapter 15, verses 2 to 34

Introduction

Connection of sidra and haftarah:

On the Shabbat before Purim, the regular sidra is augmented by three verses from the book of Deuteronomy (25:17-19), which ask us not to forget what Amalek did to us in days gone by. The haftarah deals with a war between Israel and Amalek in the days of Samuel. Its central figure is King Agag, the ancestor of Haman, about whose involvement with the Jewish people we read on Purim, in the scroll of Esther.

The setting:

Saul, Israel's first king (late 11th century B.C.E.), is a tested warrior, and he readily responds to the divine order, transmitted to him by the prophet Samuel, to make war on the people's archenemy, Amalek. This is more than another battle for land or power; it is described as a war in which the Almighty is involved—a war to right an old wrong.

For more on the books of Samuel, see our *General Introduction*.

Content of the haftarah:

1. Samuel transmits God's order, which includes the total destruction of people and things. (15:2-3)
2. Saul fights the war, but spares the best cattle and the king. (4-9)
3. God is deeply disappointed in Saul and—through Samuel—informs him that the One who chose him to be king has now resolved to reject him. (10-23).
4. Saul pleads in vain for divine forgiveness. (24-31)
5. Samuel kills Agag. (32-33)
6. Postscript: the two leaders part. (34)

(In the text that follows, but is not part of the haftarah, Samuel is bidden to anoint young David, chosen to succeed Saul.)